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Review of Marillion: Somewhere In London (Review)

Introduction

Radiohead got a lot of press the other month for their radical release of a download album where the fans could actually decide how much they wanted to pay for it. Of course, it sold shedloads and Radiohead got some kudos for changing the face of the music industry. A short time later, Thom Yorke and co. released a hard copy and said it would have been commercial suicide not to do that, and the album promptly got to number one again. And Radiohead still got lots of publicity for changing the face of the industry.

Which must have annoyed a lot of Marillion fans no end. And with very good reason.

Marillion wandered down from Scotland in the early 80's as a kind of prog rock band with a huge lead singer called Derek Dick who preferred to be called Fish (oddy enough). Despite some quite heavy rocking tracks, this incarnation is now mainly remembered for the ballad Kayleigh and nursery rhyme to music Lavender. I also remember them for Fish deciding to do a Bob Dylan-esque performance of Lavender with huge cue cards on Top Of The Pops when he had a bout of laryngitis, which I found vaguely amusing at the time.

A few years later he'd gone, and in came Steve Hogarth. A few albums down the line, the band decided something that was, and still is, pretty radical in the music industry. They asked their fans to fund an album by placing advance orders prior to the band recording it. A risky move for all involved, albeit on a small scale spread across many people for the fans, and the expectation must have been huge for those who put their money on the line. The result was Anorakaphobia in 2001 and the start of a stunning relationship between band and fans that Radiohead and others would kill for. The fans paid for it, the band created it and a deal with EMI (hmmm...) put the record company in place to distribute it outside of the band's website marillion.com.

Early last year Marillion issued album number 14, Somewhere Else, their third fan funded album and the result was the first Marillion album to hit the UK Top 30 album chart. Singles also charted quite respectably, but it appears as if the press hadn't noticed. No matter, a true musical revolution is underway.

The band toured last year to support the release of Somewhere Else and this DVD is a document of that tour, filmed at The Forum, Kentish Town, London over 15th and 16th June 2007.

Tracklisting:

Splintering Heart
The Other Half
You're Gone
No Such Thing
Faith
Thankyou Whoever You Are
Fantastic Place
The Wound
A Voice From The Past
Somewhere Else
Man Of A Thousand Faces
Between You And Me
King
The Release
Neverland

8 / 10
score

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Video

It's a concert film, so you know roughly what you're going to get. The stage isn't that big but the lighting is good but not too obtrusive visually, and there's a good mix of camera angles all well edited.

**Audio**

The main concert is supposed to be 5.1 Surround but it's mainly through the front speakers. The quality is superb but not really surround, although it's definitely more dynamic than the Stereo soundtrack.

The 5.1 mixes on disc 2 are true surround sound mixes and pretty good.

**Features**

All the extras are on the second disc.

Here's Some We Played Earlier - 7 song set list not included on the first disc and filmed over the same period. More of the same really, but the last two tracks in Sugar Mice and Easter are virtual audience singalongs and quite powerful for it.

Racket Club Rehearsal - Interesting extra which starts off with a bit of a magical mystery tour. Turns out that some Marillion fans have won a trip but not sure what for and they end up in the rehearsal studio for an intimate live performance by the band.

Somewhere Else 5.1 Mixes - four tracks in surround sound, very nice.

**Conclusion**

I'm not a huge Marillion fan (only owning the latest album and a compilation called The Best Of Both Worlds), but I have a sneaking admiration for them. What they've done in building a first class relationship with their fans is something that any band must be aiming for. Everything released must recover costs and must be paid for. The normal route is to secure a record contract and get an advance from your record company and then blow it. Marillion get their advance from their fans, who trust them enough to part with a small amount of money and get a new record in return. As with all music and bands, there's no guarantees that the shareholders will like it, but Marillion fans have enough trust in the band that so far they've financed three studio albums. Regardless of anything else, I find that simply staggering.

This DVD is a document of the tour of the last album and it's pretty good for what it is. It's an intimate forum for a concert of this kind, the stage is compact and the audience up close. It's a bit of a strange experience as a novice of kinds to Marillion as well as the music is definitely more prog/ambient rock than in your face power chords. The fans lap it up though and the band are clearly masters of their art, even Steve Hogarth plays bass for one track when Pete Trewavas whips out the acoustic guitar.

I have to admit that having heard Somewhere Else previously, I wasn't quite sure how it would come across as a live performance, but it's pretty good. It can be a little static musically at times, but I guess that's part of being a Marillion fan. It sounds good but could do with a little more energy sometimes I think. Marillion can still write duff tracks as well, as Most Toys amply proves, but the vast majority are solid pieces of rock. The DVD itself is no cheap and easy route either, it's well put together with plenty of value in the extra footage and extras.

A must for Marillion fans, a nice insight into the secret for the rest of us...

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OFFENDING COMMAND: --nostringval--

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